

APPLICATION

FOR

UNITED STATES LETTERS PATENT

TITLE: Rigid Support Ring Molded into Elastomeric Connector Lip

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Rigid Support Ring Molded into Elastomeric Connector Lip

Benefit of Priority: This utility patent application claims the benefit of the date of priority of "Provisional Application" number 60/201024 filed on May 1, 2000.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention:

The present invention, in general relates to electrical connectors and, more particularly, to devices that supply electrical power from a railroad diesel-powered locomotive to each railroad passenger car.

In passenger railroad cars, pulled by a diesel-powered locomotive, it is necessary to supply electrical power to each car. The power source is typically a generator on board the locomotive. Power is transmitted by cables, and there are power connectors on each rail car.

This technology has existed for more than 25 years, and is typically referred to as "head-end power", "hotel power"

or "trainline power" in the railroad arts. Power connectors on each rail car consist of a molded elastomeric receptacle connector, secured in a metallic housing. Connecting the various receptacles are cable assemblies consisting of power cables attached to a plug connector. Environmental sealing between the two engaged connectors is achieved by an interference fit between the body of the snout of the "plug" connector and a circumferential lip extending out from the body of the "receptacle" connector, assisted by a molded-in "O-ring" construction, common in the molded connector industry.

These types of connectors are quite large and engagement forces to connect two connectors can easily exceed fifty pounds of force. Additionally, connectors are sometimes located at unusual angles and they are difficult to engage because they are hard to reach. Sometimes, when personnel make efforts to engage the connectors, the circumferential lip of the receptacle becomes inadvertently folded under making engagement difficult or impossible and, if engagement is achieved, compromising the environmental seal between the connectors. This can allow for the entrance of rain water into the connector interface, and this may, in turn, lead to electrical failure.

Manufacturers have attempted to minimize the likelihood of this problem by fastening either metallic or non-metallic support rings around the outside of the receptacle connector using an adhesive, thereby helping to prevent the connector lip from becoming turned under. This solution has been partially effective, but still leads eventually to connector problems and failures.

Accordingly there exists today a need for a solution that helps ameliorate as many of the aforementioned problems and difficulties as possible.

Clearly, such an apparatus would be a useful and desirable device.

2. Description of Prior Art:

Railroad car connectors are, in general, known. While the structural arrangements of the known types of devices, at first appearance, may have similarities with the present invention, they differ in material respects. These differences, which will be described in more detail hereinafter, are essential for the effective use of the

invention and which admit of the advantages that are not available with the prior devices.

OBJECTS AND SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

It is an object of the present invention to provide a rigid support ring molded into an elastomeric connector lip that is inexpensive to manufacture.

It is also an important object of the invention to provide a rigid support ring molded into an elastomeric connector lip that helps prevent a circumferential lip of a receptacle, also known as the "female connector", from being folded under during engagement of a plug connector, also known as the "male" connector".

Another object of the invention is to provide a rigid support ring molded into an elastomeric connector lip that helps to maintain the environmental seal between a plug connector and a receptacle connector adapted for receiving the plug therein.

Still another object of the invention is to provide a rigid support ring molded into an elastomeric connector lip that is durable.

Still yet another object of the invention is to provide a rigid support ring molded into an elastomeric connector lip that does not increase the force to insert a plug connector into a receptacle connector due to improper mating of the two connector halves.

Yet another important object of the invention is to provide a rigid support ring molded into an elastomeric connector lip that is aesthetically pleasing.

Still yet another important object of the invention is to provide a rigid support ring molded into an elastomeric connector lip that is formed integrally with a receptacle connector.

A first continuing object of the invention is to provide a rigid support ring molded into an elastomeric connector lip that can be firmly held in its proper location in a receptacle connector.

A second continuing object of the invention is to provide a rigid support ring molded into an elastomeric connector lip that includes radius edges that prevent the

ring from damaging the elastomer in which it is embedded during normal use.

A third continuing object of the invention is to provide a rigid support ring molded into an elastomeric connector lip such that a molded-in O-ring on the mating plug is positioned underneath the support ring.

Briefly, a rigid support ring molded into an elastomeric connector lip that is constructed in accordance with the principles of the present invention has a metallic or a non-metallic support ring that is substantially embedded within an elastomeric portion of a lip of a receptacle connector. The rigid support ring is formed integral with the elastomeric portion of the lip and is disposed proximate (i.e., over) a lip that extends along an inner circumference of the receptacle connector.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a side view of a rigid support ring molded into an elastomeric connector lip with a small portion thereof that is shown in a cross-sectional view.

FIG. 2 is an end view as shown in **FIG 1** as seen along the lines 2-2 therein.

FIG. 3 is an enlarged sectional view of the rigid support ring molded into a connector lip of **FIG. 1**.

FIG. 4 is a view in perspective of the rigid support ring of **FIG. 1**.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Referring to all of the **FIGURE 1-4** drawings and in particular momentarily to **FIG. 1** is shown, a receptacle connector for use in the railroad industry, identified in general by the reference numeral 10.

The receptacle connector 10 includes a connector lip 12 that is disposed within the receptacle connector 10 along an inner circumference thereof.

A rigid support ring 14 is embedded in the receptacle connector 10 over a portion of the connector lip 12.

The support ring 14 is surrounded by an elastomeric material.

The support ring 14 includes a raised portion 16 that extends about the outer circumference of the support ring 14 and it is used to retain the support ring 14 in its proper location within a mold.

A radius edge 18 is disposed on both sides of the support ring 14 and extends around the circumference thereof. Each of the radius edges 18 helps to prevent the support ring 14 from damaging the elastomeric material of the receptacle connector 10 (in which it is embedded) during use.

An end view is shown in **FIG. 2** that includes a plurality of electrical connections that are disposed within the receptacle connector 10.

A plug connector (not shown) is inserted into the receptacle connector 10 and which includes an electrical mating with the plurality of electrical connections.

Accordingly, the support ring 14 prevents the lip 12 from being displaced or otherwise folded under when the plug connector is inserted therein.

The support ring 14 may be formed out of any desired material including metallic and suitable non-metallic substances.

The invention has been shown, described, and illustrated in substantial detail with reference to the presently preferred embodiment. It will be understood by those skilled in this art that other and further changes and modifications may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention which is defined by the claims appended hereto.

What is claimed is: